

Dead as Time

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/7697803) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/7697803>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Jack Crawford , some made up people , little Chilton - Character
Additional Tags:	Hannigram - Freeform , Time Travel , Will with beautiful shoulder length hair , younger!Hannibal , Happy Ending , Anal Sex , because duh , heartbroken Will , Angst , Suicidal Thoughts , memory palace naughty time , murder husbands murdering , Will gets beaten up because he's too beautiful , oh and rimming , Podfic Welcome , young!Will
Language:	English
Collections:	#ItsStillBeautiful
Stats:	Published: 2016-08-06 Completed: 2016-08-07 Words: 21,167 Chapters: 4/4

Dead as Time

by [SkyeMarsters](#)

Summary

After the most notorious cliff-tumble of the century, Hannibal fails to survive his wounds, leaving Will in deep despair. But when Will is paid a surprising visit from Hannibal's lawyer, events are set into motion that might just bring them together again...

Notes

As with all fictions concerning time travel, there are unavoidable plot holes and impossibilities that I have chosen to blatantly ignore. Hannibal, according to the novels, was much younger when he started studying medicine, but for the sake of the story, I tweaked his age. Only because I didn't want a ten year old Will coming to seduce a twenty year old Hannibal, because that's not really my thing. So Hannibal is a vaguely aged (25-ish) cutie pie in this story. Don't look too hard at my science. It is basically just magic at this point.

ALSO: The major character death occurs in the beginning, but it's not...sustainable. Only happy endings exist in my universe, so worry not.

The Shattering

The sensation of truly falling was more overwhelming than Will had expected, and he ventured to believe his heart would expire in his chest before ever he hit the water. Suspended that way, wrapped around one another, Will thought wildly that if anyone could defy the punishment of gravity and keep them clutched as one forever, it would be Hannibal. He wondered if Hannibal thought the same thing, because the older man's hands gripped at his waist, fingers grasped as though ravenous for Will's ribs, and even as they spiraled downward, Hannibal's eyes found his, and they were calm, no bright worry within as the water rushed up, up, its foamy threat increasing with every one of Will's hurried heartbeats. Salty wind slapped at Will's curls in the plummet, and he struggled to suck in a final breath, tucking his head into the nook of Hannibal's shoulder, determined to have that man's scent be the last to fill him. His lips pressed hungrily against the warmth, he raked his nails into Hannibal's back, and he let his eyes close. And then they met the sea.

Will's instinct moved his body to attempt separation from the pulling weight of the other man, but Hannibal's instinct was to hold on tighter, and so, as Will surged away, determined fingers bruised his biceps, digging deep to yank him back. He floundered, floated, and then was secured between the crest of waves and the panting breaths above him, pulling him, swimming them both with a strength so impossible, Will wondered if he was already dead, if the strong arms delivering him from the water weren't, instead, the enrapturing wings of an angel. But, of course, angels didn't have wings.

With a labored grunt, Will felt his body leave its submersion, and his eyes fluttered skyward at the soaking figure leaning over him. Drops of ocean fell from Hannibal's silver tips and sprinkled rapidly against the broken flesh of Will's cheek, mingling in the wound to drip down his jaw, newly red. Hannibal's eyes were calm as he loomed and pressed his fingers to the pulse at Will's neck. Both let out a shuddering breath, and then Hannibal collapsed beside Will, head bouncing sharply against the slick rock of the seaside.

Will opened his mouth to speak, but bouts of coughed-up water replaced his words and he rolled to the side, hands clenching his stomach, and emptied himself until he could breathe again. His body felt heavy, but he bent his knee and leveraged himself, pushing to roll to his other side so he could face Hannibal. The man's eyes were open and his head was lolled to the side. He was looking at Will. Always looking at Will.

"Hannibal," was all Will could manage, his throat sore and his lungs still bubbling with sea foam.

Hannibal could scavenge no response at all save a pull at the corner of his lips. Will drank in the smile, letting his eyes roam the planes of Hannibal's face, and that is when he saw the trickle of blood as it oozed slowly from Hannibal's ear. Will's eyes darted back to Hannibal's. More blood leaked a trail from his nose, and with a moan of painful exertion, Will heaved himself to his knees. His hands traced over Hannibal's face, his fingers wiping at the blood, and then he remembered the gunshot, the shattered bottle of wine, and ran his hand down

Hannibal's torso until he found the wound. He spread his palm flat and pressed against it. And all the while, his eyes never left Hannibal's.

They were shivering, the both of them, and Will laid down close, wrapping his legs over Hannibal's legs, trying to share his heat. He could feel the blood seeping between his fingers at Hannibal's gut, and the eyes, still locked to his own, were beginning to haze.

"Hannibal," Will rasped.

Hannibal blinked, and his eyes focused on Will beside him, but he did not, could not, speak. His lips remained frozen in a smile.

"Hannibal?" Will asked in a whisper, pushing up on his elbow to better assess the man by his side. "Hannibal?" His blood-soaked hand left the gun wound to cup Hannibal's face. Maroon eyes were open and staring, but not at Will. Hannibal was looking beyond Will now, to some middle distance, far away. Will gave him a nudge, and Hannibal moved laxly beneath his hand. "No," Will sighed, voice breaking as he thumbed over a sharp ridge of cheekbone. "No. Hannibal? Hannibal?" Will's fingers flew to the man's neck, feeling for a heartbeat, but his own was so deafening in his ears it was impossible to discern. He pressed his head against Hannibal's chest, trying to listen for a beating heart. "I can't hear you," Will whimpered, and he rubbed his face against Hannibal's chest. "I can't hear you."

Hannibal did not move, and he did not speak, and Will, on his knees with his bloodied hands running up and down Hannibal's limp form, could not think, only feel. He felt with the pads of his roaming fingers the soft lobe of an ear, the smooth cheek that turned to rough stubble over a noble jaw, the collarbone that jutted delicately beneath damp skin. And then Will's fingers brushed over lips, known so well but never touched, and he pressed gently against the lower lip, pushing it out of shape. His other hand he placed over empty eyes, his palm pushing shut the lids.

Will lowered himself over Hannibal's shell, and pressed his lips against the forehead, already too cold. In the wake of his kisses was blood. He kissed over Hannibal's closed eyes. The bridge of his nose, on the scar he'd so often found solace in when he had to escape a stare that had become too much. He kissed the fragile stretch of skin beneath each eye, where muscles would twitch involuntarily from time to time, and Will would always wonder whether or not Hannibal was aware of his facial tick. He kissed his mouth, soft and cool. Again. And again, as Will's body shook and sobs tore from deep in his chest.

"Hannibal," was all he could speak, and he whispered the name like a prayer, wrapping himself around the body, the waves crashing all around them on the sharp rocks. Will remained that way, drifting, clinging tight to Hannibal's body, as if his clenching nails could keep the soul from escaping.

By the time the helicopters flew overhead, Will was blue with cold, and he didn't hear the roar of the blades, for he was tucked safely away inside his mind. Hannibal was handing him a glass of wine, and Will was tugging at his tie and pulling him close, to kiss a mouth still warm from life. When the rescue team lifted his body from the rocks, it was Hannibal lifting him to carry up the stairs.

‘Allow me to draw a hot bath for you,’ he told Will. ‘Your body temperature is far too low for me to ignore. We must heat you up.’

Will nuzzled his head against Hannibal’s chest, so much hot blood coursing beneath the layers of fine cloth. ‘You want to take care of me?’ he asked, his words hardly more than a whisper against the checkered waistcoat.

Hannibal spared a glance down as they ascended the staircase, a piece of silver hair falling from its carefully smoothed home behind his ear. ‘That is all I have ever wanted, Will.’

“Somebody tell Crawford we’ve got ‘em,” a voice infiltrated through the ceiling, and Will looked past Hannibal’s crooked smile to a blurred, rushing light. Hannibal still held him, and they continued up the stairs, but around him, things were changing, sounds were altering.

“Blood loss, possible hypothermia, and a broken ankle. Christ, he’s lucky to be alive.”

“Hannibal?” Will asked amidst the chaos of sensations, and Hannibal squeezed him tight, but a woman was also leaning over him with a furrowed brow.

“He’s awake,” she said.

Will’s hands gripped at Hannibal’s lapels, but he could find no purchase there, and his fingers slipped away as if through empty air.

“Hannibal?!” he yelled, and suddenly he could not feel Hannibal’s arms at all, or the warmth of his body, only the digging fingers of the woman as she strapped something over Will’s chest. He bucked against the restraints until something sharp pinched his arm, and then he could feel nothing, and his mind fell to emptiness as the helicopter lifted from the broken shore.

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Had he a choice, it would have been to never wake up. But there he was, tragically conscious, lying on a hospital bed, tubes and IVs feeding fluids in and out, and bandages sticking to his skin with dried blood the color of rust. Every ounce of him, bone and soul, felt ripped open, mockingly exposed to the faceless nurses that shuffled back and forth from his private room. Even his eyes hurt to shut. Not that he wished to close them; every time he did, he saw the same image behind his lids.

He felt intense thirst but could not speak. The side of his face stretched tight around its stitches, and even had he not refused the straw the attendant held to his lips, his swollen, aching cheek would never have been able to suck. And if he’d desired to speak, which he did not, he would not have been capable. Not with the horrific state of his sewn together face and rawness of his abused throat. Apparently, and this he overheard from the nurses flitting about him when he was supposed to be asleep, he had yelled a single name over and over during the helicopter ride.

“Even after he had been sedated,” they whispered to each other as they changed his bandages.

“What was he yelling?” one had asked, and Will’s body responded beneath her touch with a solitary spasm of deep-heart pain.

“Hannibal.”

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Time must have passed. To Will, however, the recognition of time was a dead, pathetic thing that he tolerated only with the persistent give and take of his lungs. To Will, the hospital bed he lay in was, and had always been, the entirety of his existence. The scene on the slick rocks was from another life. The armchair he’d gripped with nervous fingers had been a falsity belonging to another man with Will’s face. The fluttering of his heart had been the lovelorn jitters of a different being. He had never taken a breath of Hannibal’s air. He had never clutched Hannibal’s shoulders and folded helplessly into him, bleeding pools on the ground between. He had never known Hannibal. Hannibal had never been his.

It was in the muck of that slow-moving, stunted dread that Jack Crawford came calling one rainy morning. It might have been the very day Will had been delivered to the hospital. It might have been weeks later. Whenever it was, Jack settled himself into a rickety chair, pulling it close to the bedside. The legs scraping against the linoleum floor created an irksome sound and Will’s eyes narrowed sharply, the only expression he could make with his face so numbed with painkillers.

Contrarily, Jack’s face looked as if it might burst from the conflicting emotions waging war across his worn features. Forlornness raged against astonishment, raged against rage, and when he opened his mouth to speak, his lips twisted into a gnarled, smiling grimace.

“It’s good to see you alive, Will,” were the first words he chose to string together.

Will did not answer externally, but within himself he was reeling, tearing down walls, ripping books from their shelves, shredding bespoke suits with his blunt nails. His voice shook the rooms in his mind as he laughed. ‘Alive,’ he shouted, and the word echoed. ‘Good to see me alive?’

‘Was it good to see me, Will?’ a welcome voice purred at his shoulder.

Jack was watching Will with a vast interest that could be interpreted as rude, or could be if anyone was present to take note of said rudeness, but it was devastatingly clear to Jack that Will was half-absent, even as he sat right there, right beside him, so close he could touch. The wide blue eyes Jack had become familiar with were dull inside their bruised cage as Will turned his head, like he was looking at someone over his shoulder. He did not speak, but his lips parted on a soft exhale.

‘Good?’ Will asked, and he didn’t need to turn around to know who stood behind him. He closed his eyes and breathed him in. He let his back lean against the sturdy chest. He felt Hannibal’s heart as it thumped, steady and living. ‘It is,’ he whispered, rummaging for the words he should have said, far away, in another world, ‘always good to see you.’

“Are you with me, Will?” Jack asked, and the sad little smile that thinned Will’s pale lips made the hair of his arms stand straight.

‘Where else would I go?’ Will answered, delighting in the nuzzle it earned him, Hannibal’s warm nose pressing into the crook of his neck.

Jack watched on as Will rested his head on his pillow, the eerie little smile still on his face.

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Molly visited for twenty minutes. The first ten she spent holding Will’s hand and trying to joke while tears streamed down her cheeks. The second ten she spent mustering up the courage to hand him the divorce papers. He signed them and she left. It had only been twenty minutes, but to Will it had felt longer and shorter. However long, however short, he had not spoken a word the entire time.

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The day before the lawyer arrived, Will tore out his IV and held the needle against the fragile skin of his throat.

‘Suicide is the enemy,’ Hannibal told him, and he closed his hand over Will’s.

‘You were my enemy,’ Will said after he dropped the needle. It landed with a tiny ping against the hospital floor, but Will only had ears for the steady breath against his throat and the lips that pressed lightly over his jugular.

‘Is that what you truly think?’ Hannibal asked.

In the suffocating world of the hospital, Will clenched his teeth in pain. In Hannibal’s arms, he breathed deeply and his response was muffled within the confines of autumnal plaid. ‘I’m not sure I know what’s true. Not anymore.’

Long, elegant fingers raked through his curls and pulled back Will’s head, tilting his face until their lips were lethally close. ‘Oh, but I do,’ Hannibal whispered. ‘My brilliant boy.’

Will allowed the nurses to replace his IV, and he didn’t tear it out again. And then, the next day, if one were inclined to count the rise and fall of the sun, the lawyer appeared.

The lawyer was a man, tall and sleek, and his suit was black on black on black. He strolled into Will’s hospital room and plopped his shiny leather briefcase on the foot of the narrow bed.

“Mr. Graham,” he said with a curt nod of his head. “I have had specific instructions that you do not wish to waste time with niceties, pleasantries, or talk of any kind, and that I should carry on with all the swiftness at my disposal.” Already he had his hand rifling through the piles of papers within the case. “So, in the spirit of swiftness and loyalty to the demands of the dearly departed, let us sally forth.”

Will licked his lips. They were dry, chapped, and split. Then he worked them to form the first words he'd said aloud in an indeterminate, inconsequential length of time. "Whose specific instructions are you following?" he croaked, throat so dry it itched as his voice crawled out.

The lawyer set a stack of papers in Will's lap and snapped his briefcase shut, and then he slid his long, skinny body into a chair. "Dr. Hannibal Lecter's, of course," he said. "As his lawyer, I'm here to notify you of the specifics of his will. Specifically, you are the only one it concerns. He has left you everything. Lecter Castle is yours, as well as his myriad of other properties, including his former home in Baltimore."

Will blinked. His index finger trailed along the edge of the paper on top of the stack. Suddenly, a paper cut. Blood bloomed. "Everything," he repeated dumbly.

"Everything he owned is now yours, Mr. Graham, from Bentleys to boxer briefs," the lawyer said. He paused, looking unsure of himself for an instant, and then reached a hand into his breast pocket. "And this is for you, as well," he said, handing the item to Will.

It was a crisp white envelope with a familiar scrawl of script looped regally on its front: Will's name, written in Hannibal's hand. Will glanced at the lawyer, who was already standing, briefcase held aloft. "Thank you," Will said. The letter shook between his fingers.

The lawyer bowed his head and ducked from the room, prompt, polite, swift.

Who knew how long Will stared at the envelope? Long enough for sweat from his fingers to dampen the paper, but short enough that, by the time the nurses came to check his bandages, he had already safely tucked it beneath his pillow. The other papers the lawyer had given him were on the bedside table. He had looked through them, the deeds and certificates and lists, proof that Hannibal had stamped himself all over the planet. But the only item Will yearned to lay his eyes on was the envelope, and whatever resided inside.

After the lights had gone out, Will took the envelope from under his pillow and traced the inked letters with an attentive fingertip. Hannibal had held the pen that wrote his name. He shut his eyes and imagined.

'Will,' he heard Hannibal say, and a rush of warmth swaddled his sorry body.

'I'm not opening it in the hospital,' Will said, leaning into the man behind him. He sighed when blood-hot arms wrapped around his waist.

'You deny yourself pleasure,' Hannibal said, pulling gently so Will's bottom was flush with Hannibal's groin.

'I allow myself time,' Will argued. 'To enjoy what I have left of you.'

Hannibal's hands tightened on Will's hips and when he leaned forward, his even breaths tickled the back of his neck. 'Tell me, Will,' he sighed, 'how will you enjoy me?'

Will considered before answering. 'I will go to Baltimore and sit in your kitchen. Open a bottle of your wine and pour a glass. And then I'll open your letter.'

In the hospital, he shifted uncomfortably on the bed, holding the envelope against his chest. Opening it now would lack elegance. He would wait until he could do it properly, however long it took to be released from care. In the end, the when mattered less than the where.

Besides, it was only time.

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Jack Crawford came by a few more times, but Will had nothing to say to him. He answered his questions with minimal interest. No, they had not killed the officers transporting Hannibal. Yes, they had killed Dolarhyde together. No, Hannibal had not thrown Will off the side of the cliff. Yes, Hannibal had died in Will's arms.

Will stopped answering questions after that, stopped looking at Jack altogether, ignoring him utterly until he sighed unhappily and, begrudgingly getting the hint, left.

Soon following Jack's departure, a league of mental health specialists herded into the small hospital room to poke and prod at Will's emotional and mental stability. Will, all too accustomed to such proceedings, answered the way he knew he must answer until they left him alone. The whole while, he grazed the surface of the crisp envelope hidden beneath the covers in his lap. When the specialists were gone, satisfied in their belief that Will Graham could be released safely upon the world once again, Will pulled out the envelope and clutched it eagerly. Soon, he would see what was inside.

It was the first time in a long time that Will took note of time's passage, and he found its speed lacking.

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Eventually, time did creep forward until Will found himself standing outside of Hannibal's Baltimore home. He looked to the ground, to the spot where Alana had lain so many years ago. Another lifetime, he reminded himself. Another version of himself, of Hannibal, of them all.

He opened the door and stepped inside. Everything appeared much the same, save the items the FBI had taken away as evidence, but the air was different. It was empty, dusty. It echoed no warmth. It was like walking through the bowels of a ghost, Will mused, taking the necessary steps to reach the kitchen.

There. The spot where Hannibal had dropped him. Will sank down against the cabinets, remembering with an air of foggy sweetness. He looked up, half expecting to see Hannibal standing over him, eyes misty and nose bleeding and heart broken. But above him was only the memory, too painful to materialize.

The envelope burned in his pocket; he brandished it and set it on the floor in front of his feet. Now that the moment had arisen, a bolt of fear dragged his hands down, weighing them to his lap, and his fingertips tingled, and his heart beat uncomfortably in his chest. He stared at the envelope.

‘Red or white?’ Hannibal asked, and Will’s eyes widened as he recalled his plan.

He took unsteady steps to the wine cellar. It was dark inside, and his fingers danced softly over several dusty bottles before landing on one, which he pulled from the shelf and cradled in his arm for his trek back to the kitchen. He considered a glass, considered drinking straight from the bottle. The thought of the latter made him smile, but a phantom held him back from the savagery, and he pulled a wine glass, also dusty, from Hannibal’s cabinet. He knew where the corkscrew was kept and found it easily. The cork popped and Will tipped the bottle until its mouth bled dark liquid into the glass. Without thinking much about it, Will reached back into the cabinet and retrieved a second glass, which he filled and set beside his own on the floor. He joined the two glasses of wine and the envelope, knees cracking in the eerie silence of the kitchen as he folded his legs beneath him.

He hadn’t read the label on the wine, but when he wetted his lips it tasted bitter. Still, he swallowed a large sip and placed it beside Hannibal’s, because, of course, the other glass was meant for Hannibal. Will would have watched him lift it delicately by the stem. Now, he only stared at it while it sat, sadly motionless, on the floor.

With the bitter drink patiently sloshing in his stomach, Will extended his hand for the envelope. It was time. His fingers hovered only a moment before sweeping it up. Again, he inspected his name penned beautifully across the front. His heartbeat staggered and he glanced down at his watch. Softly, with only the idea of sound, he whispered, “My name is Will Graham. It is 5:45 pm, and I am,” he paused for a thoughtful second, “in your house.” Then he opened the envelope.

It read:

‘Dear Will,

Firstly, allow me to apologize for the morbidity of this letter. I am sitting in my study and writing to you by the light of the fire. You have only recently left, and I can still smell your aftershave permeating the air. Indeed, if I close my eyes it is easy to pretend you are still here. But you have gone, and I remain alone with my ink and imagination. I believe it will be easier for me to continue if I picture you sitting beside me. I hope you will forgive me this use of your image, but as I mentioned, the subject matter of this letter is morbid, and I find some comfort, however shallow, in the idea of your presence while I write it.

Though it pains me to ponder such things, if you are reading this letter, I am either dead or you have been very naughty. How I hope it is your mischievousness which has led you to this point, for it is hard for me to bear the thought of you without me. If you have been peeking through the dark corners of my home and stumbled upon this letter, I insist you put it down and return yourself to me at once. And if it is the former and my lawyer has delivered this unto you after the happenings of my death, please enjoy a glass of wine at my posthumous behest. You have been through a difficult time and a glass of wine will relax you.

It might bring you pleasure, Will, to know that death was not something I feared, and I can tell you with confidence that no matter how my death came to pass, no matter when or where or why, the last thing on my mind and the last thought in my mortal head was you. I know this even now, as I sit in the safety of my study, looking at the chair which you so recently

occupied. I know your face will be the last I see, one way or another. What a human comfort it is to know such a thing.

And now I must broach the true nature of this letter. I have not only written to you out of love, but also selfishness. We are both selfish creatures, Will, are we not? Even in death, I long for you. Even in death, I have confidence in you. In this envelope is a key. It opens a trapdoor in my basement. I trust you to find it as you are exceptionally clever. Find the door, find the space beneath it, and find the box awaiting you there. The second half of my letter awaits you there, as well. But first, enjoy your wine and think of me.

Hannibal Lecter'

Will folded the letter and replaced it inside the envelope, but not before turning it over and letting the key fall heavy into his open palm. He pocketed the envelope and kept the key fisted in one hand, while his other hand fisted his wine glass. It took mere seconds for him to drain it. It took longer for him to finish Hannibal's glass, but only because he imagined the way Hannibal would drink it, in tidy, proper sips. Any other way would be obscene, so Will sipped it, tidy and proper, until the glass was empty. Only then did he think on the letter. And of the one who wrote it.

His muscles burned to stand, and soon Will was walking back to the wine cellar, where he knew the basement to reside beneath. He had never been in Hannibal's basement, not even following his arrest. Jack had told him about it. He had seen pictures. But he hadn't wanted to go there himself. Not because he was afraid of what he would see. He had been afraid of what he would feel. That he would stand in the den of the monster and feel at home.

He stood there now and felt naught but a keen anxiety pressing on his lungs. The large subterranean space had been cleansed and emptied years ago, but its residue of horror lingered, and Will breathed it in, letting it marinate his bones. It was surreal, after all this time, to be standing in Hannibal's secret space. Beverly had been strangled in the same space. Countless others had been wrecked in the trappings of walls and menace.

The key was warm in Will's fist, and he sent his gaze to roaming round the room. He did not see a trap door, could not fathom where one would be hidden. There were no carefully placed rugs or discolored squares of floor to hint the way, and after so long on his feet, Will began to waver. His ankle had healed, but it ached, and with no motivation to remain upright, Will felt himself sink to the floor. He went to his back in the center of the basement and shut his eyes.

The pendulum swung.

He could feel the energy crackling through him as the room lit up with memory. Hannibal sauntered past him, and Will followed his image as he moved from washbasin to surgical tray, his body tamed within the stitches of a plastic suit. Hannibal picked up a saw from the tray, and Will shut his eyes again.

The pendulum swung.

A different time, the same plastic suit. Hannibal was wielding a meat cleaver. A spray of blood flew past his head.

The pendulum swung.

The difference was immediate. Hannibal was free of the plastic suit, and Will watched him from the floor as he sat barefoot beside him, a notebook balanced on his lap. Hannibal looked exhausted, and Will was instantly unnerved. The sight of Hannibal, unwatched and maskless, was an all-consuming one, and Will did not even dare to blink, in fear of missing a vulnerable, valuable second. Hannibal combed his hair back before his hand came down to gently rap against the pages of his leather-bound notebook. The look of it was familiar to Will, and he squinted, but his imagination could summon no lettering. He watched, and Hannibal remained, cross-legged on the floor. Along with his bare feet, which were finely arched and smooth, Hannibal wore soft-knit, grey pants and the red sweater. Will had seen him this way few times before, and the sight of it now, so casual, so unadorned, sent a shiver down his spine. When Hannibal finally did move, Will moved as well. He lurked like a shadow as Hannibal stood and walked to the far wall. Hannibal placed his hand on the wall and pushed. The wall slid open, and Hannibal stepped inside.

Will opened his eyes. He was still lying on the floor, motionless but for his quickening breath. He pushed himself up on his elbows and gripped the key in his hand and eyed the far wall. There were no seams, no tell-tale signs. He stood and copied Hannibal's steps to the wall. He placed his empty hand against the surface and pushed. A section of wall slid away, and Will stepped through the opening. The secret door slid shut behind him.

Inside, it was utterly black. Will held his hands out in front of him and hit more wall. With a twinge of inspiration from the letter, he kneeled and touched his hand to the floor. It was smooth and cold until it wasn't, until Will's fingers fanned over a roughed section of wood, and then a metal lump. The keyhole. He held the key with both hands, and it shook in his nervous, twitching grip. He slid it in the hole, or forced it in, twisting it in the darkness until it slipped into position, and then, with held breath, Will turned the key.

A click and then a creak as Will lifted the trapdoor. A cloud of dust penetrated his nostrils, and he sneezed. His eyes were blurred as he hid the key safely in his pocket and felt for the stairs. He found the handles of a ladder, and as he lowered himself into the hidden room beneath the basement, a dim light presented itself, some sort of emergency light. By the time Will had climbed to the bottom of the ladder, his eyes had adjusted to the small, amber glow, and he was able to find a light switch on the wall just behind the ladder. He flipped it. The light flickered once, twice, and then remained, bright and white and accompanied by a slight buzzing. Will turned around slowly, and what he saw struck his heart.

The room was filled with mechanical equipment. Engines, motors, copper coils, metal shards, heaps and heaps of hardware. And in the very center of the room was an ornately carved, ebony box, not small, but not large. Will walked to it, stepping over a pile of rubber mats. He felt along the intricate carvings, imagining Hannibal's fingers caressing it in a similar fashion, and then he slowly, cautiously, lifted the lid. Inside the box was a second envelope with Will's name on it. Beneath it was a leather-bound notebook. Beneath that was a thick stack of folded papers. Will picked up the letter first and opened it, still standing.

'My Will,

You are only the second person who has ever stood in this room. It has been my deepest secret, and it is the ultimate reason for which I have written to you from beyond my prison of bones and flesh. You may recognize the journal. You have seen it before. It is yours now, as well as every thought within its pages. I plead for you to read it in earnest, for it was with complete earnestness that I wrote the words and numbers held within.

This room, this box, this journal, contains my innermost wish, one which I have strived for nearly the entirety of my life. I would not burden you with such a task unless I was dead, as it is only upon my death in which the time will come to fulfill my wish. You must fulfill it for me, my dear Will. Follow my directions closely, for I have spent years perfecting them. The blueprints beneath the journal will lend assistance where I cannot.

I leave you now, knowing full well that I will see you again. Keep in your mind this sequence: 06-21-1990.

Paris is lovely this time of year.

Yours, Hannibal'

Will folded the letter, returned it to its envelope, and placed it gently back in the box. Out of the box, he gingerly took up the journal. Its secrets scalded his palms. His thumb ran up the worn spine before he opened it. Revealed were pages and pages of tightly scrawled formulas and side notes. Will sat before he collapsed, steadying himself on an overturned tire. His eyes remained steady on the pages, on Hannibal's fevered sketches and raves. Calculations floated before his eyes and through his mind, until a rough rendering froze him completely and he absorbed the words written beneath with a pale, shocked face.

He exhaled sharply and closed the journal. He looked all around him at the pieces of hardware surrounding him, each item suddenly so specific. If he shut his eyes, he could picture Hannibal sitting in that very spot, scribbling madly in the journal, hair falling into his eyes. Will tried to calm his rapidly beating heart, but the words beneath the drawing clung to his brain, and he could do nothing but see the letters looping scarlet and sincere. It was madness. It was impossible. He opened the journal once more and flipped to the page, looking at the words again, making sure. They were still there, still the same.

It couldn't be real. It made no sense. His fingers traced each letter. His pupils grew huge and black. He read it again.

'Time Machine.'

The Gathering

Will closed the journal, replaced it inside the box, and ascended the ladder. He found his way back into the basement, up the stairs, through the kitchen. He scooped up the bottle of wine and continued to walk up the second set of stairs, into Hannibal's bedroom. There, he finally paused. He had never been in Hannibal's bedroom.

It felt incomplete, but he moved through it unhindered and sat on the edge of the bed. The mattress was firm but soft. Will brought the bottle of wine up to his lips, savagery be damned. He pulled a healthsome gulp into his mouth and swallowed. Then another, and another. Will sat on Hannibal's bed and drank up all his wine, until the bottle was empty and his stomach was full, and then he lay down, his back against the mattress and his head on Hannibal's pillow. If he craned his neck the right way, he could see his reflection in the tilted mirror over the bed. The sight of himself lying on Hannibal's bed made him flush, and he watched his cheeks grow red before he turned away, rolling to his side. He burrowed his nose into the pillow. Of course, he smelled nothing. It had been over three years since Hannibal had lived in that house, slept on that pillow. Will's eyes flittered to the closet door, and with wine's light wings did he pull himself from the bed and open it. Inside, undisturbed, were racks and racks of suits and ties and shirts, all familiar, all achingly familiar. Will glided his hand over every offering until he found what he was searching for. He pulled the sweater from its hanger and brought it down over his head. When he returned to the bed, he found his reflection again, and this time the red in his cheeks matched the red of his sweater. He curled up on the bed, slipping beneath the covers. He sniffed at the overly long sleeves that stretched past his fingertips. He couldn't smell Hannibal within the fibers. But he could imagine that he did. Will shut his eyes and nuzzled into the pillow. He rubbed at his cheek with the soft sweater sleeve.

'What would it have been like, to lie with you this way?' Will asked when he felt the movement on the bed behind him. Hannibal slipped his arm around Will's waist and pulled him close against his chest. Will imagined he could feel his heart beating. He imagined he could feel the warm breath against his neck, ruffling his hair.

'How did you imagine it would be?' Hannibal asked him softly. Will felt his lips move against his skin.

'I don't know if I ever imagined it before now,' answered Will.

The chest behind him vibrated with an easy chuckle.

Will sighed and leaned his head back, pushing into the firmness of Hannibal's shoulder. 'I imagined you with Alana,' he confessed. 'You were gentle with her.'

'Did you imagine I would be gentle with you?' Hannibal asked, and Will shook his head.

'It would be different with me,' he said. 'There would be no room for gentleness between us.'

‘Not with all our years of wanting pressed between,’ Hannibal agreed. ‘So how would it be?’

Will closed his eyes. ‘Violently necessary,’ he decided.

‘Tell me how you imagine it, Will,’ asked Hannibal, his hands rubbing up and down Will’s chest. ‘What would you do?’

It wasn’t real. None of it was real. But Will’s heart throbbed in his chest at the words all the same, and he rolled over in Hannibal’s arms so their faces were close. The day was growing late and the bedroom was dark and blue. Hannibal’s eyes were bright as he watched Will’s lips moving with careful words.

‘It would be after one of our appointments,’ Will began softly. ‘You would offer me another drink, to share with a friend, and I would accept it, even though I knew we were so much more than that.’

‘Hmm,’ Hannibal hummed, pleased, and his hand came up to cup Will’s cheek. ‘Then what?’

‘I would drink too much, to have an excuse to stay longer,’ said Will, pushing into Hannibal’s hand. ‘You would tell me I was too drunk to drive home. You would take me back to your place, because it’s closer.’

‘I wouldn’t want to risk your safety,’ Hannibal agreed. ‘I would insist you take my bed, would I not?’

Will nodded. ‘I would say no, but you would insist. When I struggled, you would grab me roughly by the waist and force me onto the bed. I would pull you down on top of me.’

Hannibal rolled them both so Will was on his back and Hannibal was leaning over him. ‘You would see our reflection in the mirror,’ Hannibal whispered. ‘What would you see?’

‘I would see your back, your shoulders, moving on top of me,’ sighed Will, shutting his eyes and delighting in the imagined weight of Hannibal on top of him.

‘And how do I feel?’ Hannibal asked, his voice husky and hot.

‘You feel heavy,’ Will groaned. ‘You’re strong, and you have me pinned down. I can,’ he gasped, ‘feel you, and you’re hard, Hannibal.’

‘Are you hard, as well?’

Will let his fingers walk the length of his body until he felt the swell beneath his jeans. He bit his lip and nodded. Hannibal’s fingers tightened on his cheek, and when he spoke it was directly in Will’s ear. ‘Answer me,’ he demanded.

‘I’m hard, too,’ Will said. ‘And your hips are grinding down on mine.’

‘Touch yourself the way I would touch you,’ Hannibal ordered, and Will grabbed his stiffening cock, thrusting his hand past the waist of his pants. ‘My beautiful boy,’ Hannibal praised. ‘My hands are bigger than yours.’

‘Yes,’ Will moaned as he tugged himself. ‘Your hand is big, and it’s hot and slick from my pre-cum.’

‘I bet you look lovely in my hand,’ Hannibal said. ‘Wild beneath me, your hips bucking helplessly, fucking into my fist.’

Will was panting wantonly, touching himself, letting the phantasmal voice of Hannibal spur him to completion.

‘When I was about to come, you would swallow me in your mouth and drink every drop,’ Will grunted as he neared the edge of hysteria.

‘I would,’ Hannibal purred. ‘You would taste extraordinary.’ He kissed Will’s neck tenderly. ‘Come for me, Will,’ he said, and he bit into Will’s throat.

Hot seed spilled from Will’s pumping fist, and he opened his eyes, gasping. He was alone in the bed, naturally, and he was covered in semen.

‘My beautiful boy,’ Hannibal whispered in his memory, and Will’s eyes shut exhaustedly. He would sleep, and then he would return to the hidden room. Hannibal wanted Will to build a time machine.

And he was going to fucking build one.

--

He poured over the notes, the journal entries, the ponderings of teacups and the reversal of time. Hannibal’s equations were thorough, thoughtful, over Will’s head, if he were being honest. But the blueprints of the machine were easy to understand, almost as if Hannibal had designed it with the sole intention of having Will read them. And that was probably exactly what he had done, Will realized with a slight grin as he held an outline in his hand. It still hurt his face to smile, but that didn’t stop Will from breaking out into a painful grin several times a day. He would pick up a wrench per Hannibal’s instructions and smile. He would find the occasional drawing within the journal of his own face, penciled to perfection, and his scar would ache beneath the stretch of his cheeks.

Time passed. Will never left the house, not a single time. He ordered groceries and seldom ate. He spent the majority of his time pouring over the piles and piles of instructions, occasionally stopping to drink more of Hannibal’s wine and sleep in Hannibal’s bed and wash himself languidly in Hannibal’s shower. It must have been weeks and weeks, but Will never cared enough to check the date. Only one date mattered, one that had already passed, and one that would come again, as long as Will followed out Hannibal’s blueprint to perfection.

Will was in a daze, as though suspended in a dream of metal and cogs. He did not allow himself the time to truly think, because he knew if he stopped to consider himself, he would find insanity. Better to continue, tunnel-visioned and determined. Never mind that time reversal was impossible. Never mind that the notion of a time machine was utter foolishness. Hannibal had trusted him to finish the design, and Will would not stop until he finished it. He

knew deep in his heart it would never work, just as Hannibal must have known. But that knowledge did nothing to hinder his hands.

He sawed and cut and hammered and drilled, and after a while a form began to take shape from the wooden platform in the center of the room. A box began to build upwards. Will fashioned spiraling coils and intricate wires. He barely understood that which he created, but his hands understood, and with them he continued to hack and smooth and level and splinter, and the box grew in height and width, and one day it stood as tall as Will, as tall as Hannibal, and then a bit taller. It grew wide enough to stand in, wide enough to turn around in. Shortly after that development, the door became swing-able on its hinges, heavy and thick and solidly iron. The buttons inside glowed with wakefulness. When Will stood back from the completed machine, wiping sweat from his forehead, the thing hummed, alive and electric and waiting. It stood patiently.

Will turned his back to it and sequestered himself in Hannibal's bedroom to think. That is when the momentousness of what he had done hit him, and he panicked. His fingers raked through his hair, yanking his scalp at every messy knot. Sweat beaded his brow. He was shaking. And then a steady hand fell upon his shoulder and caught the breath from his throat.

'I need you to breathe, Will,' Hannibal said, accent lilting majestically at Will's back. 'You cannot accomplish your goals passed out from lack of oxygen.'

A harsh bark of laughter fought its way from his lungs, and Will turned to face Hannibal. His eyes were huge and watery and blue. Hannibal's were bright with curiosity, but he maintained his ever-constant air of calm. A bubble of anger breached Will's surface. 'And what exactly,' Will growled through clenched teeth, 'are my goals?'

'Do you not know?' Hannibal asked with lifted brows.

'I think I know what your goal is, Dr. Lecter,' Will hissed, 'but I'm not so sure about mine.'

That made Hannibal cock his head, and he perched himself on the edge of the bed, crossing his legs. 'Enlighten me, Will,' invited Hannibal kindly. 'What is my goal?'

Will paced the bedroom in a cloud of confusion. 'To play mind games with me, to have me fulfill my potential for stark-raving lunacy, even after your death.'

'Do you feel like a lunatic, Will?' Hannibal asked.

'I just built a time machine!' Will yelled, his hands flying up to cover his face with sweaty palms. 'For all I know, everything in that room was one of your orchestrations, one of your games, and I was your last key player, wasn't I, Hannibal? Let's see how far we can push him over the edge.'

'You don't think it will work?'

'Of course it won't work!' Will screamed at the man not actually there. 'You can't reverse time! You can't fix something that's already broken beyond repair!'

Hannibal stood at that and took a step forward, positioning himself directly in front of Will. 'But you can fix something before it breaks,' he said. Will tried to turn away, but Hannibal grabbed his arms and yanked him closer. 'You can make something sturdier before it wanes. You can build a foundation. You can prevent. You can save.'

Tears streamed down Will's face. 'It can't be possible,' he whispered, and Hannibal wiped his cheeks clean with gentle thumbs.

'Tell me, Will, what is your goal?'

Will took a staggered breath. 'I just want to see you again, Hannibal,' he surrendered. 'I miss you.'

'Is it so hard for you to believe,' Hannibal asked, 'that my goal is exactly the same as yours?'

--

A smattering of time later, Will stood before the machine. He would go inside, he would plug in the sequence of numbers Hannibal had given him, and when it failed, when nothing happened but deep humiliation, Will would lie down in Hannibal's bed and never get up again. But first he would try. Because Hannibal had wanted him to try.

Try as he might, Will could not quash the overwhelming embarrassment he felt at stepping inside the time machine. He felt like a child with hopes too high, awaiting the inevitable crunch of despair that would follow when he entered the numbers and nothing happened.

He brought his fingers to the entry board and tapped them in carefully: 06-21-1990. All he had to do was press the button to activate the mechanism and, according to Dr. Lecter's calculations, Will would be transported back in time. Thinking that thought made Will laugh aloud and he pushed his fingers through his hair to trump the tremor in his hand. All he had to do was shut the door and press the button, and then he could go lie down. So simple, and yet all he could think of were the final lines of notes Hannibal had written on the last page of the journal.

'There is a chance the activation will destroy this time variant, and the world as it exists in this time will likely never repeat. Be sure when you activate the machine, you are prepared to face the consequence, and ask yourself, is the chance at a better future worth the sacrifice of the present?'

A long time ago, Will had made the wrong choice, and now he stood inside the time machine and knew that this time, he would choose the right thing, the only thing. He would choose Hannibal. Fuck the rest of the world. He slammed the door shut and punched the button with his thumb.

A few seconds continued forward. Will breathed once, twice, three times. And then the sound began. At first, it was nothing more than a soft hum, but it grew in volume and pitch until the metal box was violently shaking. Will held out his hands to press against the walls, holding himself up while the world around him began to quake. The buttons and lights were blinking, steaming, buzzing, and Will had to close his eyes, because it was all too much. The machine

was shaking and Will fell to his knees, no longer able to brace himself. The noise became so loud it superseded sound, and even though Will's eyes were shut, the world around him flashed a volatile, glowing white, and Will covered his head with his hands, bundled on the floor of the time machine as the world around him was ripped apart.

The Reversal

For a time, Will floated on the flow of white light, blanketed in brightness, the deafening hum a lull of calm. But eventually the light faded and the noise fell away to a hush, and Will no longer floated. Instead, he felt horrendously heavy, weighed down, and the metallic tang on his tongue alerted him of his bitten lip. He could do nothing at first but lay there, an even pressure against his back, surprisingly springy, vastly different from the hard mechanical floor of the time machine. Experimentally, he flexed his fingers. There was no metal beneath his skin, but the soft give of the earth, soil, a few blades of grass shooting up between his fingers. Will summoned a fist and grasped the handful of dewy greens and crumbling dirt. It was moist in his palm.

Slowly, sound returned, and Will heard the noises of the outdoors fill his ears. Wind rustling through the trees. Shouting voices of hollering humans. Traffic. He opened his eyes and his lashes fluttered softly against his tear-streaked cheeks. Then, finally, with open eyes and tension-curved fingers, he inhaled deeply, fully, and pushed himself up on his hands to see what he had done.

The basement was absolutely absent. Hannibal's house was disappeared, as was the time machine, and Will was lying in the center of what appeared to be a construction site. He turned his head, shocked. The entire row of houses was gone, the street was unpaved. Hair fell into his eyes and he brushed it back to tuck behind his ear. His mouth fell open, lips slack, when it took longer to pull his fingers through his hair than usual. He held a strand in front of his eyes and balked. Will's hair was long, almost to his shoulders, the way he'd worn it when he'd been – younger.

A dirt hauling yellow dragon beeped its presence and Will scrambled back on his hands, dragging himself through the trials of dirt. A cloud of dust filled the air and made his chest ache with deep-seeded coughs.

"Hey, beautiful! Get out of the way or you're gonna get run over!" yelled a voice from behind. Will twisted to look and saw an overalls-clad man gesturing with his hitched thumb. "Skedaddle!" he reiterated enthusiastically.

Between being befuddled at the descriptor of 'beautiful' and possibly having the worst jet lag in the history of time, Will dragged himself to standing. He stumbled over his own feet several times as he ducked out of the way. He watched the giant dirt-hauler roll past. The wind picked up, making his long hair fly around his head. He was in a state of shock, of this he was aware, and he needed to assess, reassess, and plan. Or possibly check himself into the BSHCI for study.

Will walked like a drunk man from the construction site that used to be (and would be again) Hannibal Lecter's Baltimore home. His head he kept down, scanning the sidewalk until he found a convenience store on the corner. This section of the city looked more familiar. Some things, after all, never change. The little bell rang when Will entered the shop, and he beelined to the back, where the restrooms were located. He had to wait for a few minutes, as the

toilet was presently occupied, but finally the man exited, and even held the door open for Will as he stepped forward with a polite smile.

When he was alone at last, considerably safe in the hideaway space, Will leaned against the door with a heavy sigh. It was easy, in that moment, to pretend that nothing had happened, that it was just another day and Will was in a restroom and everything was normal, but then he looked up through his curtain of thick waves and his heart nearly stilled in his chest. Easing toward the mirror over the sink, Will watched his own eyes, wide with disbelief as he approached, his image coming into focus more and more crisply, until he grabbed the sink with his hands and put his face so near the mirror it fogged the glass. What he saw was – impossible.

His scars were gone; in their place was smooth porcelain skin, and the scruff of beard he'd grown accustomed to was shaved so only a whisper of facial hair presented itself, just a hint of a shadow over his lip and along his jaw. The skin around his eyes was plump and bright. The lines around his mouth were barely there, just thin promises of what was to come, and the mouth itself was cherry-red and full.

He looked like himself.

When he had been sixteen years old.

What had he expected to see? The face he was used to, the face of someone broken. What he saw instead was a reflection of youthful exuberance, flushed cheeks and wonder-bright eyes. It was then, at the appraisal of his own changed image that Will finally understood what it was he had done. He had gone back in time. No, Hannibal had sent him back in time. Now the question was why? Not to be mistaken, Will understood with perfect clarity what he had to do: find Hannibal. But then what? Hannibal had spent his life trying to achieve what Will had just achieved, but to what end? Was something to be prevented? The idea shot through Will, an inspired bullet. If he could get to Hannibal, there was a chance he could influence him, save him from himself, keep Hannibal from falling completely to his worst urges. Was that what Hannibal had wanted? Will's lungs filled and emptied in rapid succession as he pondered the idea of a benevolently young Hannibal. If Will could reach him in time, sway him from the violent, stained halls of his memory palace, he could prevent the invention of a monster. Hannibal wouldn't become something Will had to destroy. He would live. He would live and Will would live by his side. He ran the faucet and splashed his face with cool water. His head pounded with possibility.

He exited the bathroom only at the behest of an impatient knocker, tugging at his forest green plaid shirt and sweeping a hand through his hair before he left. His clothes were too big for him. His body was slighter, his muscles were less developed, his shoulders not as broad. With his head down, Will shuffled from the bathroom and re-entered the overly bright fluorescence of the convenience store. His trembling hands found the newspaper stand and he picked it up, holding it in front of his face, eyes searching for the publishing date.

When he found it, he dropped the paper and it fluttered around his feet in a crinkly pile. The woman behind the cash register gave him a worried once-over. Then a twice-over. Then she said, "Honey, you alright?"

Will blushed when he realized she was speaking to him, not used to being called “honey,” not by any means. He had to flip his hair out of his eyes to fully face her, uncomfortably aware of how ridiculous the motion must appear.

“I’m fine,” he answered at last, unable to hold back the grimace that accompanied his speaking voice. Slightly higher, softer, gentler, as of yet untarnished by years of too much whiskey. His eyes glided past the head of the cashier, toward the countless cartons of cigarettes lining the shelves. He felt for his wallet in his pocket and sighed with relief when he felt its bulge. His wallet had travelled back in time with him. That was...not a thought Will ever thought he would have.

He picked up the paper from the floor and approached the cashier, placing it on the counter and then pulling out his wallet. “I’ll take this,” he said kindly, “and a pack of Marlboros, please.”

She smiled at him sweetly. “Could I see your ID, honey?” she asked.

Will frowned. He opened his wallet and pulled out his driver’s license, handed it to her, and waited. She scrutinized it closely.

“I’d say this is your father’s license if the date wasn’t so strange,” she said, amusement thick in her voice. “2015?” she asked with a laugh. “Looks like someone played a joke on you, Mr. Graham,” she said. “You might want to check the info more carefully the next time you get a fake ID made.”

She handed it back to him, and he accepted it with a sheepish smile. “I’m old enough to smoke,” he told her, not surprised when she burst out in laughter, a shrill sound.

“Of course you are, sweetie,” she said. “But I’m not going to sell them to you. I will sell you that paper you got all crumpled up though.”

Blushing furiously, he nodded and passed her the money for the paper. She gave him his change and a pack of Big Red, which he took with a confused smile.

“You’re too handsome to pick up a nasty habit like smoking,” she informed him. “These are on me, honey.”

“Thank you,” Will said, pocketing the gum and his wallet. He scooped up the paper and folded it under his arm. The little bell over the door rang as he left the store.

--

Will walked down the Baltimore street in the year 1990. He was suddenly sixteen. That meant Hannibal was studying medicine in Paris. That meant Will needed to get to Paris. He fingered his wallet worriedly. His credit card wouldn’t work and his ID was invalid, not to mention he didn’t have a passport. So how the hell was he supposed to get to Paris?

His following actions could only be included on the ever growing list of insanities committed in the name of love, or something like it. In the span of harried minutes pacing along the

sidewalk, Will concocted a plan that could only be described as insane, and as soon as he found the first phone booth (and took a moment to appreciate that phone booths were still a thing in this time space), he opened up the gargantuan phonebook and flipped to the Cs, scanning a multitude of numbers until he reached the one he needed: Chilton.

--

Will felt his Dolarhyde showing as he perched in the tree across the street from the huge house. His plan was insane, but it was the only one he could foresee that didn't involve murdering anyone, so he waited on the thick branch until his suspicions were verified and a comically young Frederick Chilton sauntered out of his family home's front door. Will held his breath as he passed beneath the tree, but Frederick didn't seem to notice the boy stalking above him betwixt the leaves, and kept on down the sidewalk with a shiny leather satchel slung over his shoulder. He must have been headed to school of some kind, college-aged as he was in this year, maybe five years older than Will was himself. They were of similar height and weight, as well, with dark hair. It wasn't a perfect match, but it was close enough, and when Frederick was out of sight, Will climbed down from the tree and broke into the house.

He found Frederick's passport in a safe in his father's study, the combination clear enough in his imagination to have it opened within minutes. He also found a pile of cash in the safe, which he stuffed into his wallet. It would be enough for a plane ticket. On his way out of the office, he swiped a pack of Chilton's dad's cigarettes.

The whole operation took less than ten minutes, and then Will found himself hailing a cab for the airport, a cigarette hanging between his lips. It had been a long time since he'd tasted the curious smolder of smoke on his tongue, and he savored the rebellious flavor.

--

When Will had been younger, actually been the sixteen years he appeared to be at present, side-eyes and smiles cast in his direction had always been mistaken entirely for looks of judgment for his peculiar brand of mental malady. But now, in his sixteen year old body, but filled with the experience of forty odd decades, Will was noticing the attention paid him in a completely different light. The woman who swept her eyes over Frederick Chilton's passport and gave Will a ticket for the first possible flight to Paris barely registered the face in the photo, failing utterly in discovering the lack of resemblance. She only had eyes for the boy in front of her with the big blues and thick, sable curls that kept falling into his face. Will puffed out his cheeks and blew the hair from his eyes and relished in the strangeness of being flirted with by a woman, especially when, from her meager crumbs of knowledge, he was at least twenty years her junior.

It was strange, but it was also beneficial, and so when she slid him his ticket with a smile, he smiled right back before turning away from her, letting his hair flip naturally over his shoulder as he did. Strange was the look from the guards as he walked through the security gate, but accompanied with a certain heated intensity that had Will walking faster, not from the fear of being found out, but the fear of having to turn armed guards down for a date. It was strange, as well, the look he received from the customs officer who checked his passport. Will stood straight and calm, or as calm as he possibly could, and waited while the officer's

eyes flitted between Chilton's photo and Will's face. After a moment of more strangeness, the officer stamped Will's passport and handed it back to him with a friendly wink. If it was anything more than a show of friendliness, Will didn't want to think about it. He was through his security checks now. All that was left was for him to board the plane that would take him one step closer to Hannibal.

--

He didn't sleep during the flight, couldn't, but his mind did wander, as it was wont to do, back into the vastness of his memory. There he found Hannibal, stoking the fire in his office, golden light dancing across the glass of Will's whiskey tumbler. The rumble of the plane's engine sank into the crackling of the fire, and Will leaned back his head to rest against the leather of Hannibal's chair. He shut his eyes and felt the air around him stir with warmth as his mental-self opened his eyes and grinned at the man leaning over to poke at the fireplace.

'Eye contact is uncomfortable for you,' Hannibal began, turning from the fire, his hair catching the frolicking orange glow of flame, 'and yet staring at my backside serves to be minimal trouble.'

Just like that Will lowered his creeping eyes, but his mouth spread into a slick smile, one Hannibal sought out as he rose from the fireplace and stepped towards Will. His fingers edged beneath Will's chin, still scruffy and adult in his memory, and tilted it back until he won back Will's eyes, fully and completely.

'How often did you stare at me when I wasn't looking?' Will dared ask, feeling gloriously fragile in the strength of Hannibal's supple-sweet touch.

'As often as you stared at me, I imagine,' Hannibal answered. 'Or that is how I like to imagine it, in any case.'

Will laughed, a breathy one-shot of amusement, until Hannibal slid his hand's position to cup Will's cheek, thumbing along his jawline with serious attention.

'One might argue it is impossible to share space with you and not be tempted,' Will said, voice weak. Hannibal raised an eyebrow, just slightly, and Will finished, 'Tempted to stare.'

'My presence induces the commandment of your attention,' Hannibal agreed. 'But tell me, Will, how has your presence commanded the humans at your disposal?'

Will's eyes crinkled at the edges as he frowned, thinking. 'What are you asking me, Doctor?'

Hannibal's upper lip twitched at the title, but Will let his detection of it slide, and waited instead for Hannibal's explanation. It came swiftly, on the tail of a calculated sigh. 'Do not insult me by pretending you failed to notice the attention you've been receiving on your quest.'

'Attention?' Will asked, though he knew exactly what Hannibal meant, what he was trying to get to without actually saying. But Will wanted to hear him say it, and so he proceeded as

follows: ‘I don’t think I understand. What kind of attention do you think I’ve been receiving?’

Hannibal’s hand left Will’s cheek to run the gauntlet of soft curls, down into the nape of Will’s neck, where the hand gripped tightly. Tightly enough to draw a gasp from Will’s lips, pleased and surprised.

‘Have you so masked your self-awareness to become ignorant to the unparalleled power of your beauty?’ Hannibal inquired softly, ushering Will forward by the neck, a doll in his hands. ‘Your face is the purest element I have known. Even strangers bend before it. Tell me you have not noticed such and be a liar.’

Will licked his lips, wonderfully aware of the draw of Hannibal’s eyes to his wetted mouth. ‘One might argue beauty doesn’t exist without a beloved to admire it.’

‘A liar, then,’ decided Hannibal, and he leaned forward to press his lips against Will’s.

“Nuts?”

Will startled, his eyes opening to the stewardess in a flush of confusion. She cocked her head at him concernedly before repeating, “Nuts? Soda?”

“No. No, thank you,” Will answered, stymied and steamed. Once she had walked on down the aisle, he leaned back against his firm airplane seat with a plaintive sigh, trying not to think on how his mind’s eye had referred to Hannibal as his ‘beloved.’

--

After the landing of his plane, Will, based solely on the extremeness of his beauty, was the first passenger to hail a taxi, and he did so almost as soon as stepping to the sidewalk. After that, it was a simple manner of informing the driver of the correct address, and then they were off, Will watching Paris zip by in a blur of lights.

Night had truly fallen by the time they reached the impressive building, and Will paid the driver handsomely before exiting the vehicle. He stood in the boastful shadow of the hospital and shivered with the realization that Hannibal was somewhere inside. The thought was altogether too much for one heart to bear, and his eyes closed involuntarily and he swayed on his feet before a hand softly gripped his elbow.

“Can I help you, sir? Do you need medical attention?” a honeyed voice asked in French.

Will cracked open an eyelid to see a kind-faced nurse standing at his side. He shook his head and steadied himself before politely shaking loose her hold.

“No,” he told her. “I’m here to visit a friend.”

She smiled at him and continued on toward the building entrance. He followed a few steps behind her, but after she had flashed her pass at the doorman and he had hailed her through, Will was prevented entry by that same man.

“Can I see your badge?” the man asked in French.

Will’s brow creased in a frown, and he tilted his head to the side as if to hear better. The doorman smiled even as he rolled his eyes a bit, and said again, this time in accented English: “Can I see your badge?”

“Oh,” Will said with faltering confidence. “I – don’t have one.”

The doorman shrugged his shoulders. “I’m sorry, sir,” he said, seemingly genuine. “No pass, no entry.”

“I need a pass to enter a hospital?” Will asked, confused.

“This is an employee entrance,” the man explained. “And an entrance for students. You need a pass.”

“I need to visit a friend of mine,” Will said.

“You’ll have to get a pass from him then.”

“Please,” Will asked with his sweetest voice. “It’s important.”

“It’s late, sir,” the doorman said, the first human immune to Will’s charms of batting lashes and helpless little sighs. “I suggest coming back in the morning.”

Will thought about overpowering the doorman, and somewhere in his deep well of consciousness Hannibal’s dark eyes were gleaming with approval.

“There’s a popular bar across the street from here,” the doorman said suddenly. “If your friend is a student here, there’s a good chance he might show up at that bar when he finishes his shift. Most of them do.”

The idea of snapping a neck was replaced with the fantasy of sipping hard liquor, and with a friendly nod for the doorman, Will heeded his advice and turned, for now, away from the hospital. He would return in the morning. He had plenty of time.

--

Music escaped from the opening door of the bar across the street and around the corner, and Will tracked the synthetic beats like a hound scenting blood. There he was, wind-chafed, sixteen, and freezing on an unfamiliar Parisian street, no plan in his head save the meager ‘find Hannibal’ that kept circulating obsessively and threatening to short-circuit his brain. He needed a drink. His feet hit the asphalt with delicate echoes as he moved across the lightly trafficked road, the music from the bar building in volume and familiarity as he neared the sticker-covered bar door. When Will entered the warmth of the crowded bar, his lips cracked into a smile at the song blasting on the speakers: Roxette’s “It Must Have Been Love.” It was almost as brilliant as the sea of denim jackets and leftover 80s hair that dominated the moodily-lit populous.

Will ran a twitchy hand through his long hair and let his eyes sweep nervously over his own outfit. Much to his chagrin, his plaid shirt and loose jeans fit in perfectly with the bar-hoppers of yesteryear. Well, it was a classic look, he told himself as he stepped toward the bar. The bartender was a young man with thick, round spectacles and brightly striped suspenders. A flannel rag stuck out of his back pocket, Will noticed, as he spun around to grab a new bottle of vodka from the blue-lighted liquor shelf. His eyes widened marginally and then sank behind heavy-lids when he spotted Will, a reaction that was becoming strangely expected. Apparently, Will, by the awe-inspiring action of merely standing in existence, had the power to draw the attention of many, just as Hannibal had said. What was it about his appearance that demanded such amazement, he couldn't quite peg. Was it his hair that bounced with curls grazing thick on his shoulders? Or his cherry-red lips that he sucked anxiously between his teeth? His slighthness of frame or huge blue eyes? Whatever it was, the bartender was upon him in moments, and three women were clamoring to buy him a drink.

He politely waved them off, in no mood to be sociable, and in no intellectual shape to try and speak conversational French. What he could do, however, was order a double of whiskey. The suspended bartender blessedly bypassed the checking of Will's license, and happily poured him his drink, letting their fingers touch as he passed it over with a wink. Will smiled awkwardly and paid before retreating to a back corner of the bar where, with any luck, he would be ignored.

Naturally, Will's luck was none too much, and in minutes he was put upon to speak. Not by adoring French women wanting to pet his curls, but by a herd of disapproving college students of the terribly male variety, their faces stricken with bemusement as though Will's very presence was an insult to them. And perhaps it was, he would think later as he nursed his bruised eye, for upon Will's entrance into the bar, all attention was refocused onto his person and stolen from the lesser-than faces of the usual sort. Incomparable, one might kindly call Will's face, and incomparability had a way of coaxing all kinds of attention, good and bad. One wary glance at the foursome of Frenchmen suddenly surrounding Will's chair told him that this was the bad kind. He cleared his throat and tried not to toss his hair back from his eyes, though the urge to do so was strong.

"Hello?" he asked, keeping his eyes darting quickly over their faces without landing on a single feature long enough to spotlight.

The words that passed within the next few minutes of their, for lack of a better word, conversation were boisterous, cruel, and hateful. Will's stroke of talent with Cajun French was enough only to worsen his situation, and after an unfortunately translated turn of phrase about 'fucking off,' indignant fists were coiling around his shirt collar and catapulting him from the safety of his chair. Will was dragged out the door with not even the bartender capable of saving him. His future looked bleak as he slammed into the pavement outside and, sure enough, a boot kicked into his gut seconds later, right as "Nothing Compares 2 U" began playing on the bar stereo.

The beating lasted until it stopped, whether by the grace of God or the outraged yell of a passerby, Will couldn't be sure; he was too dizzy. He was sure, however, that after the outraged yell, he was dropped unceremoniously to the cold sidewalk, and his head bounced against it with a skull-throbbing pop of sound. The noises that followed were the slaps of

sneakers against the pavement as his assailants fled down the street, the disparaging huff of coarse Lithuanian, and Sinead's tragic warbles.

A figure stooped in front of him on the cold Parisian street. Will watched the blood drip to the sidewalk in fat, scarlet polka dots. His stomach was twisted in knots. He knew that aura, the one belonging to the figure, the one who had yelled. He knew the calm in and out of breath, and the smell, clean and masculine and elegant. He knew the touch at his shoulder, long fingers softly squeezing. And he knew the voice. God! How he knew the voice that whispered near his ear in the next moment.

"Are you alright?"

Will could have wept from the sound he was so starved for, and he almost did. His eyes brimmed with unshed tears beneath his curtain of curls when he lifted his head to face the young man kneeling before him. A gasp escaped him. It couldn't be helped. Because right there, right in front of him, touching his shoulder and leaning so close Will could feel his breath on his cheek, was Hannibal. Alive and beautiful and strikingly young. And right there.

Will's hands abandoned his control, reaching out to cup Hannibal's face. Hannibal stilled, surprised but indulgent, allowing the trembling, bloody boy on the ground to touch his precious face. Indeed, he even paid Will a gentle smile and set his own hands over Will's forehead, feeling for fever.

"You are quite hot," Hannibal said, his eyebrows knitting together with a doctor's façade of concern.

Will opened his mouth to speak, but could not. He surged forward instead, and burrowed his face into the crook of Hannibal's neck, breathing him in, uncaring of how strangely inappropriate it was to be doing so to someone who, from the other's perspective at least, was a bonafied stranger. He cared not, and to his shock, Hannibal didn't seem to mind so much either. In fact, as Will breathed deep the scent of familiar skin, Hannibal rested his hands at the back of Will's head, his fingers lacing through the thick strands of curls. A few people walked past them, huddled absurdly together outside the bar, and Will sobbed against the body holding him. So alive. So warm.

"You aren't well," Hannibal said softly. "Do you have anywhere to go?"

Will shook his head, his fingers gripping tightly into Hannibal's shoulders.

"You will come home with me then, so I might tend to you."

Fingers smoothed Will's hair and wound their way round his head to rest beneath his chin, which he tipped upward, so as to command the attention of Will's eyes. And their eyes met. Hannibal's were deep and darkly welcoming. They were Hannibal's eyes. Will had thought they would be lighter somehow, that they would be less marred by violence, but the inhuman spark he knew so well was still present. The glint of trouble was still persistent. The smile lines around the eyes were alien-smooth, however, and Hannibal's skin was glowing and silky in the streetlamp light. His hair swept across his forehead, soft and shining, blonder than Will had remembered. No silver streaks yet gathered within the ash.

Will tried to speak again and failed harshly, but through his parted lips a sigh escaped, heart-heavy and fragile, and as Hannibal settled his cool fingers around Will's neck to test his pulse, Will's eyes fluttered to a close and he collapsed forward. He felt Hannibal's still-strong arms catch him and sweep him up, and as he carried him to wherever it was they were headed, Will let himself nest his head in the warm hollow of Hannibal's elbow. Exhausted and finally back in Hannibal's arms, he allowed the peaceful dark to fill his eyes.

The young medical student looked down at the passed out boy in his arms and smiled. It had been a long time since he'd seen anything quite so beautiful.

The Teacup

When the darkness drifted and lifted into the light of the present-past, Will found himself in territory not entirely unfamiliar. He was nested in a bed, thick blankets tucked up to his chin, and sitting beside him with a leather-bound journal balanced on his knee was Hannibal. Though Will wished to be silent and observe the man in his young adult environment, the movement of his waking already alerted the medical student to his bed-guest, and Will found amber eyes thrust upon him before he could feign sleep. It was not the first time Will had woken to find Hannibal beside him, but it was the first time such a face had inspected him with the golden morning light setting his sharp features on fire, and Will sat up beneath that awesome gaze. He smoothed his hair, knowing that it was wild and tangled in every way that Hannibal's was silky and perfect. The gesture brought Hannibal's eyes to narrowing amusedly, in the way that would eventually carve lines into his skin, and Will was all at once taken up into breathless agony, to be so near him and unable to speak the truth of their likeness. For what could he possibly say that would not paint him mad?

"You slept through the night," Hannibal finally spoke, breaking the strain of silence and causing Will's heart to slam in his chest. There was that voice again, and the lips that wrapped sensuously about his measured words. "I am glad to see you in the daylight. How do you feel?"

Will's head was spinning. He was glad to see him in the daylight! How badly Will wanted to scream that he was glad to see Hannibal in the daylight, in the moonlight, in the light of any life they could be given, but his mouth worked open uselessly and no words came forth except, "Hannibal."

A brief panic gripped him before Hannibal chuckled softly, seemingly unperturbed by the fact that Will knew his name before it had been announced. "You had a look at my nametag, then," Hannibal said, and Will saw the white coat hanging over a hook on the wall. "I confess, I thought you were too far concussed last night to see anything but the back of your eyelids, Will." That made him visibly startle, and Hannibal lifted his hands in peace. "I apologize for my forwardness. I was worried for you and went through your pockets for information." Hannibal's head tilted, and Will felt for a moment that they were back in one of their sessions. "A curious set of identifications, but I decided you look more like a Will Graham than a Frederick Chilton. Am I correct in this assumption?"

Will cleared his throat. "Yes," he said, voice surprisingly clear, "my name is Will Graham."

"Lovely," responded Hannibal, and he leaned forward in his chair with an extended hand. "Allow us to be properly introduced then, Mr. Graham." Will took the offered hand, hoping his own was not too sweaty. "My name is Hannibal Lecter."

"Hello, Hannibal. You can call me Will," Will responded faintly, trying not to grip Hannibal's hand too tightly. They shook hands, two firm shakes, and then all too soon Hannibal withdrew, leaning back in his chair.

“Will,” Hannibal said as if to test the word in his mouth. “From the American South if my ears do not deceive me.” Will nodded his correctness and Hannibal continued, taking a moment to close his journal and set it on the side table. It was, on closer inspection, the same journal gifted in the will. “I fear Paris has wasted no time in showing you her maleficent underbelly. You must be in some discomfort this morning.”

Only then did Will think of the night before, when he had been dragged outside the bar and beaten. He touched a tentative finger to his tender cheek and hissed at the jolt of pain. “Is it bad?” he asked his doctor, who watched him as closely as Hannibal ever had.

“I inspected your injuries last night,” Hannibal said casually, like the idea of prodding an unconscious teenager was run-of-the-mill. “My first fear was for broken ribs, but yours are only bruised, quite badly, granted. I treated the cut on your face. If it scars, it will be hard to detect.” Hannibal crossed his hands in his lap and smiled. “You were lucky. If any of your attackers had known how to properly fight, you would be in rather worse condition right now.”

“You saved me,” Will said before he could filter his thoughts.

“How fortunate, for you and I both,” Hannibal said.

Will wanted to tell him that it was only the first of many times Hannibal would save him, but the words crumbled to dust on his tongue and he smiled sheepishly, settling with a subpar “thank you,” which Hannibal accepted graciously.

When Hannibal stood from his chair and walked to retrieve his coat from the hook, Will realized with a pang of yearning that Hannibal was about to leave him. He threw back the blankets and rushed from the bed, until he was clutching Hannibal’s shirt in his trembling hands, too weak to grip tightly and too desperate to pull away. Hannibal allowed it, watching Will with interest.

“I-I’m sorry,” Will stammered, but when he tried to extricate himself from his position of humiliation, Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will’s back and held him fast.

“I’m sorry I have to leave so early into your convalescence,” Hannibal soothed. Will felt sweet circles being rubbed into the small of his back and he had to physically fight the threatening tears with a shake of his head. “I will be back as soon as I am able. For lunch, perhaps? Would that be suitable?” Hannibal leaned far enough back to seek Will’s eyes, which he demanded and conquered with as little effort as ever. “Will?”

Will bit at his lip and nodded. He could apologize again for throwing himself into Hannibal’s arms, but knew it would be fruitless, knew the damage had already been done. The truth was, even if he’d wanted to, there was no way Will could ever willingly abandon the sacred warmth of Hannibal’s embrace, and it was only when Hannibal led him to the bed and unfolded his hands from his shirt that Will was forced to set him free. The absence immediately stung at his chest and in the corners of his eyes, and when Hannibal flattened his palm on Will’s forehead to check once more for fever, Will’s eyes slid shut and he leaned hungrily into the touch.

“Your temperature is normal, but I’d like for you to rest here until I return. Sleep is the best medium of natural healing,” Hannibal said, and smoothed back Will’s hair before removing his hand. “I don’t know who you are or why you’re here,” he said slowly, and his tone was unusual enough to snatch Will’s attention from chasing Hannibal’s scent. Hannibal sounded unsure of himself, and Will could not recall a time self-hesitance had ever painted Hannibal’s voice.

“I don’t know either,” Will said softly, bunching his fingers in the sheets to keep from reaching for Hannibal again. The rest of the thought hanged heavy in the space between them.

“Perhaps,” Hannibal said after a span of unknown time, “you will do me a favor when I return.”

“I will,” answered Will quickly, feeling his cheeks begin to blush with the sea of possibilities.

“Good,” Hannibal said. He swept a loose curl from Will’s forehead before turning to leave. When his hand was on the doorknob, he looked over his shoulder at the heap of beautiful boy on his bed and smiled wickedly. And then he was gone.

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Predictably, Will was a mess after Hannibal’s departure. He flung himself from the bed and groped about the tidy dormitory for a mirror, which he found lying on a dresser along with scarce other personal items. Mostly, Hannibal’s room was filled with books: medical books, philosophical books, a bible and other fictions. A comb rested beside the hand mirror, and Will took up both to tend to his appearance. He ignored the purple bruises on his face until he had tamed his locks, and only then did he prod at the blackened eye and cut across his cheek, the one Hannibal had already tended to while Will lay unconscious on his bed. Will watched his reflection, watched the little bead of sweat gathering in his hairline at the thought of Hannibal’s hands on his body. He watched until the sweat broke and ran a shimmery trail over his brow, and then he swiped it clean and set down the mirror. He was more fascinated by the hangings on the wall than his own damned face.

Above the bed, in loving etchings of charcoal, a grayscale girl was staring at Will with mirthful eyes. He knew instantly it was Mischa’s image, and it stood out among several others, renderings of faces from Hannibal’s past, each placed carefully on the wall, his signature, unaltered after all this time, curled at every corner. Will lost himself in the drawings, letting himself sink down to the mattress as he watched the light travel over Mischa’s face. He had stood at her grave and felt Hannibal’s grief, and now he saw her, contained within the textured teeth of paper, and felt that grief once more. It radiated from the drawing and made Will clench his jaw. Surely, surely her death had been why Hannibal had begun his calculations and research into the reversal of time. The journal was lying on the side table as proof. Surely, Hannibal had longed to return to the past, to prevent his sister’s demise. Will wrung his hands as he tried to contain his composure. Why hadn’t Hannibal sent him to an earlier date? Why hadn’t he built the machine earlier and travelled back himself? Why save it for Will to do, and why send him to here and now instead of there and then? Will was sitting in Hannibal’s dorm room, and he had no idea what he was meant to do next. Prevent Hannibal from becoming – what? Hannibal was Hannibal. Mischa had been killed,

the events already set into motion for his becoming, if he had not already become. The look in his eyes told Will that he had. So what?

Will settled his head into the plush pillows and breathed in Hannibal's lingering scent. He shut his eyes and let his senses overindulge, rolling onto his stomach to quell the burgeoning swell in his jeans. The sigh that followed was helpless and loud and vocalized at the end so that a groan rang through the empty room like a lusty bell.

Hannibal was alive, and Will cherished the thought, hugging the pillow to his chest, oblivious to the hot stream of tears dampening the sheets. He was alive and Will didn't care why he was there, but he was happy, he was so blissfully happy that he was, and that he would continue to be, for as long as Hannibal would allow.

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For the second time that day, Will woke up with Hannibal beside him.

"How is my patient?" Hannibal asked with a playful air of authority. He tapped his pointer finger over the cap of his knee, his legs crossed as he sat regally straight in the chair.

Will knuckled the sleep from his eyes and sat up to finger-comb his hair. "I feel much better," he answered, and it was true now that Hannibal was back.

"You must be hungry," Hannibal said, making a smile break out across Will's face.

"I am."

"You must allow me to treat you, then," Hannibal said, standing up from the chair. He held his hand out, and Will stared at it dumbly for a moment before reaching to take it. With Hannibal's assistance, he stood from the bed. That done, he thought Hannibal might drop his hand, but he didn't. He held it in his own and walked them across the room towards the door.

"Are we going somewhere?" Will asked, befuddled but enticed.

"I would prefer to cook for you, but my kitchenette lacks the proper tools at present," Hannibal explained, opening the door.

Will followed where he was led, but his look of concern did not go unnoticed by Hannibal. When the young doctor stopped in his tracks to assess Will's worried face with an arch of a curious eyebrow, Will sighed and spoke his discomfiture. "Hannibal," he began, unable to keep the smile from forming on his lips as the name unfolded on his tongue, "you can't take me out like this. I have a black eye."

"And you are also walking with a limp," Hannibal added, squeezing Will's hand. "It makes no difference to me. You must be fed."

He continued them down the hallway, Will walking self-consciously. He hadn't known he was walking with a limp. "People will stare at me," he grumbled.

“Yes,” agreed Hannibal. “I am sure they will stare. But it will not be because of your black eye.”

“The limp, then.”

“They will stare because you will be the most beautiful thing they have ever seen, black eye or no,” concluded Hannibal, and he had to half-drag Will the rest of the way to the elevator, stunned as he was.

--

They did receive stares when they arrived at the restaurant, but Will was sure most of the eyes were strictly cast on Hannibal. He wove through the tables like a predator, Will in tow behind him, and when they were seated, the candle's flicker danced elegantly along his cheek. Will was still blushing from Hannibal's declaration of his beauty, but Will was convinced Hannibal was the better looking of the two. Will had thought him a distinctly handsome man before, when his eyes had boasted crinkled edges and his mouth was lined with sophisticated creases, when his hair had been dipped in starlight. But now, now Hannibal was unearthly in his radiance, and it was all Will could do not to leap at him from across the ivory tablecloth.

Will pried his eyes from Hannibal's curved lips before he broke into a sweat, leveling his gaze instead at a beautiful painting hanging on the wall above them. He didn't have to find the signature at the bottom of the canvas to know it was one of Hannibal's. With rejuvenated boldness, he met Hannibal's eyes.

“It's beautiful,” Will said, and for a flash of a second, he was transported back to the Cliffside, bloody and broken in Hannibal's arms. He coughed into his hand to lose the image from his mind, trying to focus on the Hannibal in front of him. “It's yours.”

“It is,” Hannibal said, placing his napkin into his lap. “I have been fortunate enough to sell several of my paintings.”

Will allowed himself a second scrutiny of the painting, and his eyes widened at the suddenly apparent subject, which was a rocky seaside, waves crashing violently on a slew of jagged black rocks.

“I thought you might prefer portrait study,” Will said, striving for a casual tone, though his breath was bordering on cartoonishly bated. “Based on what I saw in your room.”

“Ah, my sketches,” Hannibal said. “I do enjoy portraiture, Will. How considerate of you to have noticed. But I paint whatever inspires me, and this time I was taken in by a dream I had experienced and not a face.”

“You dreamt of this place?” Will asked slowly, not sure what answer he hoped to hear.

Hannibal studied the painting with a blank face before retuning his full attention to Will. “I did. But like I said, I create what inspires me, and sometimes it has been sharp edges and ominous waves. But other times it is a face. Never has it been a face such as yours.”

“My face?” Will sputtered.

“Will this be your favor to me, I wonder?” Hannibal asked. He picked up his glass of water, ice clinking teasingly as it was lifted to wet his lips. “I would love to capture your image.”

Will could have laughed for it. No matter what point in the space-time continuum, Hannibal Lecter was always going to want to draw Will’s Graham’s face.

“Is that a yes?” Hannibal asked after he swallowed his drink of water and replaced the glass to the table.

“I will allow it,” Will said, because how could he refuse? Why would he refuse?

“Thank you,” Hannibal said and Will smiled, happy if Hannibal was happy.

--

Hannibal was easy to make happy, Will noted, when all he had to do was sit on the bed and stare at Hannibal while he stared back, only Hannibal had the convenient excuse of a pencil in his hand and Will had to settle for fidgeting his thumbs restlessly.

Upon their return from lunch - an event that Will decided had to be mentally labeled as a date since there was candlelight and an insistence of ordering dessert - Will had been easily posed into a simple recline against the headboard of Hannibal’s bed, and now his image was being recreated by Hannibal, who sat stoically, soaking up Will’s face, staring for minutes at a time, and then his head would turn down and he would commit graphite to paper until he looked up once more.

It was easy work. All Will had to do was lounge on Hannibal’s bed, keep still, and pray he was the only one who could hear the overzealous beating of his barely contained heart. Ultimately, and Will should have guessed this would be his downfall, Hannibal smelled him, thus shattering Will’s thin illusion of calm. Hannibal tilted his head and shut his eyes and set down his pencil. Will swallowed, probably too loudly, and didn’t have to brainstorm horribly hard to figure out what it was Hannibal was scenting on the air.

“Will,” Hannibal said when he opened his eyes and fixed Will with an endless gaze.

“Yes?” asked Will innocently, but he knew it was too late. He knew he had been found out.

“Are you uncomfortable?” Hannibal asked, setting his sketch pad on the desk behind him.

“No, I’m comfortable,” Will insisted as he shifted on the mattress, keenly aware of the tightening in his jeans, roundabouts the zipper.

“If you’re feeling stiff, please feel free to stretch,” Hannibal said. “Walk around for a few minutes while I sharpen my pencil.”

Stiff, indeed. Will was hard and Hannibal could smell it, his arousal wafting full across the room to pervert Hannibal’s nose. Nonetheless, Will decided to tread cautiously and heed Hannibal’s dubiously thoughtful suggestion of ‘walking around the room.’ Frankly, he had

been through too much within the past day, or, technically, years and years, to have any space left in his body for harbored feelings of shyness. So he stood from the bed, letting his silhouette simmer confidently beneath Hannibal's eyes, a tent of denim casting its shadow on the hardwood. From that position, he lifted his arms over his head and stretched in earnest, momentarily mindless of the way his shirt rode up his midriff or the unstoppable groan of satisfaction following the popping of unused limbs. He bounced on the balls of his feet, coming up on his tiptoes in a lengthening stretch, and then he did walk around the room, or rather he walked across the room until he was standing directly in front of Hannibal, who had not stirred an inch from his place on the chair.

Will had not meant to end up there, looming over Hannibal with an erection, but there he was all the same, and he stood his ground, not backing away when Hannibal's eyes darted up to his face, not even when Hannibal's hand reached out to him. The hand didn't connect with its target, however, which Will could only have guessed was his waist, and Hannibal withdrew his seeking touch before contact was made and replaced his hand politely in his lap.

"Will you take a break, too?" Will asked, the boldness in his voice surprising him thoroughly. "We can walk around the room together." Before he could lose his nerve, Will reached for Hannibal and took up his hand, and then Hannibal did stand up, suddenly several inches taller than Will and looking down ever so slightly.

"Do you not wish to see what I've done so far?" Hannibal asked. "You don't want to know how I see you?"

Hannibal was standing close, so close his heat was flooding Will's skin and making him blush furiously beneath the weight of his eyes and the roughness of his hand. He was too close to step away from, but not close enough to lean against, so Will stepped even closer, eliminating the space between them completely and laying his head against Hannibal's chest. It was into the soft fabric of Hannibal's sweater that Will whispered his answer. "I already know how you see me," he said.

"Oh?" Hannibal asked, and Will could detect the miniscule notes of bewilderment deeply twined in his voice. "How do I see you?"

Will pressed his nose against Hannibal's chest in a nuzzle before looking up at him. Hannibal would either think him insane or understand, but Will hadn't travelled through time to not find out, and so he said: "You see me as yours. The same way I see you as mine."

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat and he blinked at Will. Will had the pleasure of close proximity and witnessed the automatic enlarging of Hannibal's pupils. "We are just alike," Hannibal said.

Will nodded and tried to swallow down the lump in his throat. "Yes," he said.

Hannibal finally moved, lifting his hands to cradle Will's head, and Will lost whatever hold on his nerves he had and fell apart in Hannibal's arms. He did not fall, because Hannibal wouldn't let him fall, and Will felt his body being swept up from the floor. Hannibal carried him to the bed, where he sat down, gently settling Will in his lap. And a hundred moments rushed through Will's memory, a hundred opportunities missed, chances he had dashed, times

he could have been with Hannibal this way and was too stubborn to succumb. But he had seen Hannibal lifeless, he had felt that tangible, horrendous loss, he had struggled for breath in a world without him in it, and he knew exactly what it was he was missing. So he turned his head to face Hannibal, decades younger but exactly the same, and he twisted his fingers into his ashen hair and pulled him forward until their lips met in a brutal collision.

Violently necessary.

Will's heart pounded in his chest as he finally allowed the ultimate moment to happen, and they were kissing, their lips were pushing roughly together, and finally, finally after a lifetime of denial, Will felt right. It was right to be kissing Hannibal. It was right to be pressed against his chest, mouths open and panting and tongues touching shyly, and then eagerly as the kisses grew in fervency. The heat between them was years in the making, forwards and backwards in time, and the energy coiling between their bodies was an explosive, volatile element that nothing could threaten, not even death, because together they were death-defying. They were immortal in their love, and Will knew it was love. It had been love all along. And he felt it rushing through his veins and tingling in the tips of his fingers as he traced down Hannibal's shoulders and around to his back, where he gripped heartily and beckoned his love even closer.

Hannibal was a force, a wild, gorgeous, superhuman force, and Will was enveloped entirely as he was laid flat, his back against the mattress and his front against an all-consuming tide of blood and bone and passion. He tilted his head to expose his neck, and Hannibal met the offering of milky skin with sharp teeth and hot, needy lips, and the groan that rose from Will's throat was wanton and agonized, and he fisted the strands of hair at the nape of Hannibal's neck to keep him, to encourage him to bite harder, to make him bleed, to leave a mark, because to be marked by Hannibal was to be whole and brilliant and gleaming.

It was nothing like Will had imagined, because he had been afraid to let himself imagine such a sublime image of divine supplication. It was everything and it was so much more, and his fingers bent to claws as he raked them down Hannibal's back, still covered in mortal wrappings, but the reaction was still attained. Hannibal growled, a dangerous, muffled growl into the crook of Will's neck, and he did bite down harder then, at the insistence of Will's taloned hands, and when the skin broke beneath his sharp canines, they both moaned from the pleasure, and then their mouths found each other once more. Will tasted his life on Hannibal's tongue, and his hips bucked helplessly into the solid body on top of him.

He pulled away to breathe, and Hannibal chased his lips down, closing over him in a seal, and they breathed together, slowly, heavily through their noses, unwilling to pull apart for even a second, so valuable was the ember of skin as they touched. Hannibal's hips began to roll, demanding Will's reply in the way of stolen gasps and legs that spread wide beneath him. Unhindered by rational thought of any form, Will arched his back to rub his jeans-clad length against Hannibal, and when their mutual, otherworldly arousal came together between them, they both sighed, collapsing fully into their kissing mouths. They rutted together, bodies sliding and grinding, the air surrounding them a field of electricity that sparked and bustled and urged them on, on, until Will could take it no longer, and he pushed Hannibal off of him to clamor his digits around the button of Hannibal's trousers. He unfastened the barrier quickly, and Hannibal helped him pry the clothes from his body until he was bared

absolutely, and then he leaned down and sought Will's belt buckle, and then his zipper, and then he had Will's clothes joined with his own in a mindless mess on the floor, and when their bodies came together again, they were stripped to skin on skin.

Never had Will allowed himself to think on it, on how it would feel to have Hannibal's cock swollen and leaking hot against his thigh, and now that it was happening, he could not think at all. He could only feel and accept, and he folded his hand to wrap around that secret piece of Hannibal's body, and it was velvety smooth but rock hard. Will groaned in tandem with Hannibal as he rubbed his palm over the dribbling slit and, with a pre-cum slickened palm, began to squeeze and pull, up and down Hannibal's achingly purple length.

It was a melding of magics, their combined power, one over the other, sloshed together in a battle of pure and filthy love. Hannibal grabbed Will's wrist and stole his hand away from its sumptuous machinations, and then the other, and then he imprisoned both of Will's hands above his head against the mattress, cuffing them helplessly within one iron fist. With his free hand, Hannibal gentled down Will's shaking frame, over a youthfully smooth, unmarred chest, until his fingers tangled in a deliciously thick bush of hair. Hannibal scraped his nails through it, milking Will's throat of all sound, and he slid his long fingers softly up the pulsating shaft, circled the head, and tickled his way back down. Will rocked beneath him with abandon, his eyes rolled back, trapped within the cruel rapture of Hannibal's caress.

The hypnotizing hand traveled down, down into the sweat-slick crevice of Will's backside, and blunt edges rubbed coaxing circles around his clenched entrance, fingers dipping and kneading. Hannibal sucked at Will's lower lip, biting softly before releasing him from their kiss, and Will watched with heavy lids as Hannibal sank down, lowering his artful form over Will's trembling one, until his tongue darted out to taste the tip of Will's engorgement. Will cried out and his hips thrust up, but Hannibal moved on, moved down, down until his head was stalwart between Will's thighs, and his hands were shoving Will's legs even further apart. And then Hannibal's mouth closed over Will's nerve-tight hole and he began to suck.

Will's world turned blindingly white at the moment of contact, as Hannibal's wet, suctioning lips fastened over his ring of vulnerable, tender skin and untested muscle, his long, lavishing tongue stroking wet licks, soaking Will's hole with his saliva. It was not a moan that sounded from Will's mouth, but an animal cry, an insane plea for some unimaginable solace, a begging for more, for all of it, and Hannibal complied and pushed his tongue inside. Will fought for consciousness as finger communed with tongue, and his resistance was put upon until it broke. Hannibal's long finger slipped all the way in, swirling and plunging. The delicacy of the breach was too much, and Will sobbed into his hands, powerlessly pliant as Hannibal removed his mouth to sweetly kiss Will's inner thigh, and then added a second finger. The stretch of Will's unused asshole burned, but Hannibal's lips on his unsullied flesh burned brighter, and he focused on the sugared sucking of Hannibal's plump lips against his thigh instead of the pain of his preparation. He had experienced pain in Hannibal's arms before, and it had always been equal measures torture and ecstasy. This time was different, and it was the same, and Will threw his head back with a scream when Hannibal added a third finger, upping his speed and lessening his caution, and the roar of pain firing Will's nerves faded to mild discomfort, faded to elastic elation, and when Hannibal finally tore his fingers away, Will's hole twitched at the loss, and he pushed himself off the bed to rub his cock against Hannibal's stomach, a vine growing towards the sun.

Hannibal sighed Will's name as he worked his laving tongue back up Will's body, until he reached his bite mark and tasted the lingering drops of blood. Then he kissed along Will's jaw, and then his lips, and Will could feel the bed moving beneath them as Hannibal slicked himself and lowered his hips, lining himself up to Will's pinkened entrance. And Will was so greedy for it, for that final stake of ownership, that he clutched at Hannibal's hips and lifted his knees to wrap his legs around Hannibal's back. He could feel the thick head bobbing against his ass, and angled his hips encouragingly. When Hannibal broke their kiss, Will whined until he knew his conqueror's intentions. Their eyes met, Hannibal commanding every molecule in Will's body, and then, without breaking eye contact, he pushed inside.

Time became an unreality as, inch by inch, Hannibal sank himself within. When Will closed his eyes, he saw his Hannibal, silver-haired and wonder-lined from an ocean of years without Will by his side, and he was lying on the rocks and smiling up at him with unadulterated adoration in his dimming eyes. Will opened his eyes wide, his lashes damp against his cheek, and he clung to this new Hannibal, this here and now Hannibal, who was alive and inside him. He had always been inside him, Will knew, in his heart and his mind, but now it was physical, and it was completion and fulfillment, and when Hannibal was fully deep and Will could detect every pulse, every beat within his walls, he crushed Hannibal's lips with his, and pushed down harder on Hannibal's length, urging him to move. He did, with quick, measured thrusts at first to loosen the tension in Will's tight heat, and then he pulled from Will's body completely, orchestrating both of their breaths before slowly, so slowly tears streaked down Will's face, he slid back inside. He teased with his cockhead, tiny undulations just inside Will's hole, until Will was quaking beneath him and beating his fists against Hannibal's back, great gasps wracking through his chest. And then Hannibal began to push further, but at such timid speed that Will wailed against the hollow of Hannibal's throat and drew blood from his impatient scratches over Hannibal's backside and along his sides. Red, angry stripes that only encouraged Hannibal to slow his pace even more, sinking languidly, sating his own appetite until he was completely sheathed. Will's lips were parted, gaping with silent throes. Hannibal began rocking them, barely pulling off before pushing deeper, finding Will's mouth between thrusts, kissing him, soft and slow.

Hannibal's hair swept over Will's sweaty brow as he quickened the jutting of his hips, and with every thrust the air was knocked from Will's lungs, and his whimpers diminished into a pleased staccato. Will could die, Hannibal could stab him with a thousand knives, and nothing would ebb the perfection of Will's happiness in that moment. A brief moment in time was all it was, but it was enough, and it was more than Will had ever expected to have. And he was having it with Hannibal, who by all rights should be dead.

"Hannibal," Will whispered as he writhed beneath his love's fevered thrusts. And with a mutual cry of heavy satisfaction, Hannibal's hips bucked erratically, thrust once more, deep as he could go, and Will felt the pulse of Hannibal's release as he emptied himself. Will took everything Hannibal offered, squeezing his muscles tight as his own release was pulled from him, and he came in a rush over Hannibal's stomach. It spread sticky between their bodies when Hannibal, still inside, collapsed on top of him. Will, panting wildly, combed his fingers through Hannibal's damp-darkened locks. Hannibal kissed his neck, over the bruising mark he'd left, and sighed contentedly. He was heavy on top of him, and too hot, and Will smiled whole-heartedly, as happy as he had ever been.

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Hannibal could not linger too late into the day, though he assured Will how much he'd like to; but he had work to do, a night shift he could not get out of, and as the sun began to set he pried himself from Will's arms to dress. Will watched him move about the room, his limbs still lazy and his body wonderfully sore. Hannibal slid his lab coat over his shoulders and bent down to kiss Will's cheek.

"Don't leave me," Will complained, only half-joking, and Hannibal tugged at his hair adoringly.

"I would not, if it weren't very important," Hannibal said, straightening from the bed and turning to the desk to pick up his hand mirror and check his hair. "I promised the head of the department I would sketch him his cadavers for his presentation tomorrow morning. I cannot disappoint him," he said, adding with a skillfully arched brow, "much as I'd like to."

"Cadaver sketching?" Will asked, not surprised in the least. If his memory served, those sketches would be what earned Hannibal his scholarship to Johns Hopkins.

"I will be in the morgue all night," Hannibal said, tucking an errant strand behind his ear, "if you need me."

"I need you," Will said with a laugh. How weird to laugh, not as a mask for something darker, but as a release valve for the soaring brightness in his heart.

Hannibal set the mirror down and straightened his lab coat. He turned to Will with a humored frown. "To my surprise, I seem to need you, too," he said. "That is why I will return as quickly as humanly possible."

Will said with a smirk, "You aren't human, Hannibal."

Hannibal studied him for a moment, hand on the open door, one foot out into the hallway. "Neither are you," he said. They shared a smile, and then he was gone, the door clicking gently in his wake.

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For a time, Will entertained himself by looking dreamily out of Hannibal's window. He opened it, trading in the thick musk of sex for the fragrantly fresh Parisian air. The night smelled sweet and clean, and Will stuck his head out the window, laughing when the wind picked up and tousled his curls. Eventually, it was the pull of the sketchpad that summoned Will from the bed, and he stepped lightly across the hardwood floors to pick it up. Hannibal's drawing of him was everything he had expected it to be: steady, sweeping lines, indulgently shaded hair, doe eyes. It made Will roll his eyes, not nearly as large as Hannibal had rendered them, and he set it carefully back down where he'd found it. That's when he saw it. The leather-bound journal. He itched to pick it up and flip through it, and so he did with little qualms. He had already read it cover to cover, after all, he just wanted to see how far into his work Hannibal had ventured at this point. He was mildly surprised to see only the first few

pages filled in, even more surprised when a folded sheet of paper fluttered from the center of the journal and fell open at Will's feet.

When he bent over to pick it, he winced happily at the pain of the stretch. Will held the sheet aloft to examine its scrawl. It was written in French, but that was fine; Will could read it much better than he could hear it, and it took mere moments for him to decipher the words. And just as quickly, his heart dropped.

Written on the page was a name: Zigmaz Milko. Beside the name was a date: 06-22. Beneath the name and date was a time: 11 pm.

Will looked at the clock hanging on the wall. It was 10:30. He replaced the paper, folding it and putting it back where he'd found it, and then he shrugged into his clothes and slipped out the door.

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This was it, Will thought as he approached the doorman. He knew the name on that paper. He'd done his research. He knew Hannibal had killed him, that he was somehow related to the death of Mischa. It couldn't be a coincidence. Hannibal must have sent Will back for this purpose. To stop him from murdering Milko. Will was confident Hannibal had not lied when he said he'd be in the morgue of the hospital. He knew Hannibal liked to kill where it would be easiest to clean up afterwards. The morgue would be empty and easy. Will just had to get there in time, and only the doorman was in his path.

"You again?" the doorman asked, sounding slightly annoyed.

Will didn't have time for it. "Bonsoir," he said. "I need to get in to see a friend of mine."

"Same friend I didn't let you in to see last night?" the doorman asked with needless antagonism.

"That's right," said Will.

"Do you have a visitor's badge this time?"

"Sure," Will said, and he reached into his jeans pocket, at the same time walking closer to the doorman. When he pulled his hand from his pocket he punched the older man in the throat. The doorman slammed to his knees, clutching at his neck, and that's when Will kicked him hard in the head. He fell face-first to the ground, unconscious, and Will barely spared him a glance before hurrying through the door. He didn't have much time. He had to get to Hannibal.

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The hospital was large, but easy to navigate. Will just headed down the staircases until he saw the door for the morgue. It was in the basement, naturally, and he opened the door as stealthily as he could before moving inside, like Hannibal's mongoose beneath the house. But where was the snake?

Most of the lights were turned off, save a few on the far end of the room. Will could make out a handsome figure sitting at a drawing stand, bent over in concentration, a body laid out before him on a metal table. Hannibal seemed to be the only one there, or so Will thought until he heard a slight stirring behind a supply shelf to his right. He turned on his heels, his breathing cool and silent, but it was so shadowed in the corners by the door he couldn't make out anything until it was too late. Will was struck in the back of the head and he crumpled to the floor.

His assailant, who Will could only assume was Milko, must have counted on Will being out for the game, because he walked right past him without a second glance. Will lifted his head from the cold floor and gazed at Milko's back as if through a fog as he slithered through the curtains of shadows towards Hannibal, whose back was turned away. When Milko stopped behind the edge of a wall, Will caught the metallic gleam in his hand and he had to clamp his hand over his mouth to keep his panicked gasp unheard. Milko had a gun and Hannibal couldn't hear him approaching, focused so entirely on his work. The dreaded idea seized Will's brain and he pulled himself to his knees.

What if Will's arrival somehow changed the outcome of this night? What if Hannibal was so distracted by thoughts of Will that he didn't hear Milko? What if Will had traveled back in time only to inadvertently kill Hannibal all over again?

"No," he whispered, raising himself to his feet. He began after Milko, the hum of his quickening blood the only sound in his ears. "No," he said, louder this time, and Hannibal perked up his ears and turned around. Will saw Milko see him and lift his gun. "No!" Will screamed and he jumped at Milko, throwing all his weight into his back so they both fell forward, smashing into the wall.

Milko's gun clattered to the floor loudly and Will only had time to shout Hannibal's name once before meaty hands closed around his throat and began to squeeze. Will's vision blurred and his eyes watered as the life was constricted. His nails clawed down Milko's arms, tearing his flesh until blood welled up and splattered onto the sterile ground. Will was too senseless to hone in on Hannibal's lethal approach until he was already upon them.

An autopsy saw came down Milko's head, and Will was instantly released. He scampered back as blood sprayed about the room. He looked up and saw Hannibal coming down for another blow, but Milko had only been shallowly gashed the first time around, and he was already moving away, reaching behind him. Will hurried to his feet, slipping twice on slippery puddles of blood before finding his footing, and he was at Hannibal's side within his next heartbeat, right as Milko was pulling his second gun from the hidden strap beneath his jacket.

Will barreled into Milko headfirst into Milko's gut and knocked the gun from his hand. He fell on top of the man who still bled copiously from the saw wound at his crown, and his vision was as red as the flow of blood. The man beneath him had tried to kill Hannibal and for that he would pay. He cranked back his fist and brought it down with a crunch against Milko's nose. It gushed down his face, choking him, but Milko, with a burst of adrenaline, was bursting up a moment later and effectively throwing Will across the room. Will slid across the slick floor, hitting his head against the edge of the wall with a crack.

But Hannibal was faster than Milko, and he didn't need an adrenaline burst to win. He lunged at the newly upright Milko with his saw, and with a graceful flit of his wrist, sliced into Milko's arm, then his stomach. Hannibal turned to find Will, who was watching from the floor with dull eyes. When Hannibal turned back, Milko had picked up the gun, the first one he'd dropped, and aimed it straight for Hannibal's head.

They circled one another. Will crawled toward them on his belly, unnoticed in the darkness. He lifted himself silently behind Milko, who was speaking to Hannibal now in Lithuanian. It made Will grin. He caught Hannibal's eye over Milko's shoulder, and on silent agreement, they moved.

Will jumped on Milko's back and tore into his throat with his teeth. Hannibal stepped inside the reach of Milko's gun with his autopsy saw, digging the chopping blades through the flesh, muscle, and bone of his gun arm. Milko might have screamed if Will hadn't torn out his throat, because it must have hurt when his arm detached from his body and slapped wetly against the floor. Will jumped from his back and fell against Hannibal's chest, and they watched together as Milko staggered, blood spurting from multiple wounds, all of them deadly. When he finally fell, it was with a satisfying splat of revenge. Will and Hannibal watched the body twitch until it finally ceased, and then Milko was dead.

Will was breathless, and when Hannibal spun him in his arms to look at him, he could have fainted from the intensity in those black hunter's eyes. Will wondered if his eyes shared the same victorious shimmer. Hannibal felt along the cut at Will's temple where he'd hit the wall. They were both covered in blood, a perfect parallel to their kill before the fall. Will nuzzled against Hannibal's chest, like he did at the Cliffside, and then he knew. At last, it was clear. Why Hannibal had sent him back.

Hannibal had wanted Will to share in one of his kills, to become whole, and to have time enough to enjoy it. Not to prevent Hannibal from becoming a monster, but to allow Will to share in it with him.

Will choked on a sob. When Hannibal tipped his head back, he began to laugh. This was all Hannibal had ever wanted for him, for both of them. He cupped Hannibal's face in his hands and lowered it down to kiss. He pressed his lips to Hannibal's and closed his eyes. In his memory palace, smiling at him beside the fireplace, there was Hannibal, just the way Will remembered him. He'd sent Will back, not to save his sister, not to save himself, but to save Will. And now, finally, they had nothing but time.

And it was beautiful.

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